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## **Youth policies in France: old trends and new tendencies**

*Patricia Loncle-Moriceau*

### **Summary:**

This article analyses the main evolutions of French youth policies since their birth at the end of the 19th century, and does so from a threefold perspective: the players involved, levels of decision making and contents of the agenda setting. To reach these aims, the article is divided into three parts: the first focuses on the progressive development of French youth policies from their conception to the middle of the nineties; the second on the growth of youth policies from the middle of the nineties to the present and the last focuses on the current difficulties of French youth policies.

**Key words** : youth policies, history, public stakeholders, NGO's, local authorities

### **Introduction**

“By putting young people at the top of France’s policy agenda, the Prime Minister and the Government have set out to restore trust in the future and to fulfil the republican promise toward youth. (...) This priority, embodiment of the new French model, is present throughout the policies implemented by the Government. (...) Whereas youth trajectories are ever-changing, public action categories create insurmountable discontinuities and often lead to many forms of exclusion. The whole government is therefore working on an overarching plan which focusses on common rights and cross-sector actions. (Youth priority, February 2013, 14).

This kind of assertion is quite new in the French political landscape: it demonstrates the great importance recently given to youth issues. Since the arrival of François Hollande as a President in 2012, youth has been presented as the main priority of the French government. Many actions are performed under the Ministry for Youth, Sport and Urban Policies but also with a cross-cutting perspective mobilising main ministries that develop public actions for young people (education, social and health affairs, housing, culture and, employment). This reality seems to be the result of a continuing process that begun in 1995 with growing attention to youth on the agenda-setting of many public players at various levels of the

decision making process. It turns out that local authorities at all levels (and in France, there are many of them!) have dramatically developed their ambitions, financial means and intervention methods towards young people and have thus shown a growing expertise in this field. As a result, vertical and horizontal cooperation among public authorities have now become central issues.

What are the reasons behind this particular development? Does it mean that decision makers intend to reinforce young people's routes to adulthood by introducing strong and coherent schemes and more broadly, improving access to rights? Does this enlarged focus meet the growing needs of young people, especially those who are the most vulnerable, in a context of long-lasting social crisis? Or, on the contrary, are the reasons elsewhere, for instance, in the alignment with transnational values and norms such as employability, accountability, efficiency and cost reductions (Le Galès 2014)?

In this regard, youth policies are labelled as "integrated", meaning they concern the whole range of public policies (from European to local level) for young people (not only in the sector of leisure and citizenship but also in employment, education, health and social affairs, etc.) (Siurala 2005). These policies are examined according to the employment-centred youth transition regime (Walther 2006) to which they belong: how are these policies shaped by this regime? What does it imply for young people's rights?

Youth here is not really defined from a sociological point of view because in France, as elsewhere in Europe, this issue has really become complex as a result of the end of the thirty-year boom period (Cavalli and Galland 1993). Consequently, youth is rather considered as a category of public action and the article focuses on the ways this population and its difficulties are translated into public action issues and then put on the agenda (Dubois 1999; Garraud 2004).

From an international perspective, the progressive institutionalisation of the welfare states throughout Europe has helped to differentiate public actions nationally. As shown by Van de Velde (2008) or Walther (2006), youth policies have been largely shaped by the various welfare regimes (employment-centred, universalistic, liberal, and sub-protective). Consequently, the French transition regime has been built on the status of employee and will consider families responsible for their children (even above eighteen years).

For a long time, youth policies were considered as irrelevant in political analysis due to their narrow scope and lack of study about them. This article is therefore based on the few

published works on their history (Besse 2008; Bantigny and Jablonka 2009) and on the analysis of their implementation (Loncle 2003, Labadie 2007, Hbila 2012). It also draws on the outcomes of several research projects carried out by the author over the last two decades (on the history of youth policies, local participation of young people, the decentralisation of the *Fonds d'aide aux jeunes* – a local scheme that delivers financial support for the most excluded young people- and on the implementation of local public policies in health and social affairs). Its theoretical background pertains both to youth sociology and public policy analysis.

This article analyses the main evolutions of French youth policies since their birth at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and does so from a threefold perspective: the players involved, levels of decision making and contents of the agenda setting. It is in fact the linkages between these three elements that reveal the main variations and turning points that have affected youth policies throughout the history of youth policy. It also represents a good means to understand the ongoing weaknesses and limits.

To reach these aims, the article is divided into three parts: the first focuses on the progressive development of French youth policies from their conception to the middle of the nineties; the second on the growth of youth policies from the middle of the nineties to the present and the last focuses on the current difficulties and weaknesses of French youth policies.

### **The progressive development of French youth policies: primacy of territories and multiplicity of aims (1870-1995)**

From the beginning of the Third Republic (1870 and following years) to the middle of the nineties, youth policies roughly followed the building of the French Nation state and then its Welfare state. This is well known by political scientists: a centralisation of powers and competences, massive and continuous growth and, an expanding ability to control individuals' behaviours (Le Galès, 2014). Since the end of the seventies, a new process has emerged and youth policies, as the rest of the state's apparatus, have followed a decentralisation and territorialisation trend.

How is it possible, bearing this general statement in mind, to specify French youth policies?

#### **1870-1936: the roots of youth policies: private players and territories to serve various causes**

The roots of youth policies took place in a threefold context at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the building of the nation state, industrialisation and urbanisation. The case of France was not isolated in this respect: most European countries were undergoing the same processes and tended to come up with the same responses. Schemes for young people were usually tested at local level and then extended beyond the national borders. This was the case for instance with youth patronages which were invented by Don Bosco in Turin in the first middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and then implemented across European countries in large cities undergoing the same urbanisation. Similar trends could be observed: scout movements, Christian youth movements (Rural and Urban Christian Youth), Young Men's Christian Associations and youth hostels, among others. These youth movements spread internationally through networks maintained by specialised journals and international exhibitions.

At the beginning of the period, youth policies could be divided into two groups: at national level policies to involve youth in building and defending the national territory (educational and military policies) ; at local level policies to deal with the consequences of urbanisation and industrialisation (poor housing, rural exodus, lack of training and education, poverty, malnutrition and poor health...). As far as social issues are concerned, initiatives related to larger debates on the relevance of social policies. They were also embedded in particular conflicts such as the high tensions between the Catholic Church and secular militants that marked the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Nevertheless, as most actions were carried out in territories and were not framed by law, they depended largely on private players and varied dramatically from one place to another.

Our thesis has demonstrated that these actions had the following in common: they were usually implemented by notables (either people with mandates or aristocrats) who were interested in social philanthropy and who were involved in various charity organisations or benefit schemes. These individuals and public authorities worked alongside each other as they came from the same background (they had socialised in the same charity networks – whether religious or not).

Nevertheless, implementation varied considerably and seemed mostly guided by the social situation of each territory. We researched the archives of two particular territories at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Rennes (a medium sized city in Brittany) already quite a wealthy administrative city and Lille (a large city at the north in the country) which was facing major changes due to urbanisation and industrialisation (Loncle, 2003).

In Rennes, there were few youth movements and all were private (coming from what would later be called “associations”). They came under three generalist patronages (one secular and two catholic) and fought each other (at least the secular against the catholic) to exert their influence on local young people. In this context, the role of public players was limited to financial and symbolic support (through public addresses in particular) provided to private players, at least the secular movement on account of the national tensions between Republicans and Catholics. The contents of actions for young people mainly focused on sport, culture, and education. Poverty, poor health and housing conditions did not however appear completely relevant in this context.

In Lille, youth movements were more numerous and mainly organised in patronages that were more specialised than in Rennes (some were dedicated to young people who intended to become priests, others to apprentices or to particularly poor youths). Public authorities were much more involved and proposed their own initiatives: they owned land for a holiday camp and they administered an orphanage. They helped young people in similar ways as in Rennes but they also focused on poverty (they provided meals and coal) and were quite closely linked to charity and hygiene services set up by the city council.

Thus, this period can be characterised by the progressive development of youth movements from both an international and a very local perspective. Youth players mainly came from the private sector; public authorities were usually secondary but may have played a more significant role when their community was deprived. The contents of actions would focus on young people’s leisure and education or on more cross-sector issues when social and health needs were acute.

### **1936-1982: the growing role of the state, the narrowing of objectives**

The beginning of this period marked an important turning point in that a national body dedicated to youth and sport was set up. This can be considered the birth of national youth policies, and to help us understand the trends that would affect such policies over these five decades, it is useful to divide the period into three sections.

1936-1939: The leftist government of Léon Blum created a national body known as the *Sous-secrétariat aux loisirs et aux sports* and led by Léo Lagrange (a former socialist MP of the North). Although the name of this body does not include the word “youth”, all youth movements referred to Léo Lagrange as the Ministry for Youth.

The Léon Blum government is still well known in France as it was the one which introduced paid holidays. Consequently, much of what the Ministry did, involved supporting future holiday-makers in various ways: cheaper train tickets for young people and setting up youth hostels and campsites are prime examples.

Other actions tended to help develop sport: introducing sport certificates and setting up many sport facilities.

During this period, the ministry and youth movements (in particular the secular ones) appeared to be on very good terms: Léo Lagrange consulted the latter on a regular basis; youth movements proposed adequate actions to meet young people's needs.

As the ministry's name implies, the main challenges addressed were sport and leisure. However, Léo Lagrange intended, through this apparently narrow range of actions, to restore hope for young people in France: "The hardship of city life, rampant urbanisation along with pollution although not yet called that, inhumane working conditions or worse, hopeless unemployment. And nothing to look forward to but war. And these antiquated and hypocritical morals obeyed by nobody, yet passed down by parents, teachers, employers, neighbours, priests or pastors, and newspapers. The crime and curse of being young, having to fit into a society, so despairing, made by others" (Léo Lagrange quoted by Mauroy, 1996). We can underline that this first attempt at developing a national youth policy is rooted in the will to develop a positive vision of their future for young people.

This first body dedicated to youth would greatly influence the shape of future youth policy-making due to its rather mythic dimension.

1939-1945: this period was of course dominated by the war. The Vichy government paid much attention to youth and worked a lot in this area. It created a very official state body in charge of youth headed by Georges Lamirand and even a department to oversee youth movements. The Vichy government seemed to adopt more or less the same strategies as the Hitlerian and the Mussolian regimes did towards youth: this population was particularly precious since it enabled national socialist propaganda to be developed to defend the country.

Much was undertaken to help train and indoctrinate youth, in particular through new schools for managers (the most famous of which was Uriage). Paradoxically, this school would be where intellectuals gathered to imagine a new future for the country, and to organise the resistance.

The relationships between the ministry and youth movement were usually tense, the latter opposing indoctrination and compulsory membership. The main emphasis was on sport and education (but from a very patriotic point of view). Nevertheless, during this period rules and norms were adopted to control youth movements and facilities that would still be used after the war.

This sad period and the particular attention given to youth would durably foil any attempt at constituting a strong sector of national youth policies in our country.

1945-1982: this last sub-period was mainly marked by the growth of the state in our country. As a consequence, in the field of youth policies, many actions tended to echo this process: many rules and norms were adopted to frame the interventions, new schemes (centres for youth and culture, youth clubs, community homes, etc.) and new professions were created (in particular youth workers). Various ministers for youth and sport followed each other. The most famous was unquestionably Maurice Herzog (1958-1966).

Maurice Hertzog was an important youth minister in that he proposed an ambitious action plan that, in retrospect, seems very modern. His aim was to develop a cross-sectorial youth policy with various other ministries (in particular family affairs, health, housing and defence) and to embed this policy in a permanent negotiation (co-management) with youth NGOs, which were keen to participate in this partnership (which was not yet called as such).

Nevertheless, apart from these seven years, policy plans for young people tended to remain rather modest during this period if they are put into the perspective of the general strengthening of the state.

During this period, and in particular the last sub-period, the role of local authorities seemed to become secondary. They were no longer leaders in youth policies and may appear rather weak in this respect. An in-depth analysis of their actions may nevertheless contradict this first impression.

In Rennes, for instance, the sixties were a very important decade that would durably shape the organisation of the local youth policy. A new mayor, Henri Fréville, was elected in 1953 and remained in office until 1977. He came from the catholic right wing and had quite a big ambition when it came to social and youth issues. One of his policies involved setting up a service in charge of social and cultural affairs in 1966. It brought together council services, the family allowance fund, social housing providers and representatives of local NGOs from social, youth and cultural fields. The objective was to encourage the development of a



partnership able to foster coherent local policies. It became the epicentre of local youth policy-making, giving rise to a strategy for implementing youth initiatives and assigning NGOs and youth workers across towns and cities. The above meant that this period cannot be considered as inexistent with regard to local authorities, despite towns and cities being different from each other in terms of local policies in general, and youth policies in particular. Nevertheless, this role would be dramatically reinforced over the following decades.

### **1982-1995: the decentralisation process and the dilution of youth policies**

The eighties and the first half of the nineties were marked by a paradoxical process with regard to youth and youth policies. Youth clearly became one of the major targeted populations for public authorities due to the rise in youth unemployment, urban rioting and the growing awareness of social and inequalities faced by young people (in particular those living in deprived areas).

Parallel to this, much was undertaken for young people although the heading “youth policies” was referred to less and less; to such an extent, it almost disappeared altogether. France, like other European countries, was also influenced during this period by the first development of the so-called governance process (Le Galès 2004). This includes a decentralised decision making process, more public authorities, public and private service providers, NGOs as well as the beneficiaries and users of services being involved, (Jessop, 1999).

New policy instruments and watchwords were developed for French youth: policies had to be more local, and cross-sectorial. They also had to be contractual, meaning they had to be funded by both the state and local authorities. Four new initiatives symbolised this trend: the creation of *Missions Locales* for youth employment, the development of urban policies, the allocation of special funding for schools in deprived areas, and the implementation of policies to fight delinquency.

The *Missions Locales*, which were set up to help young people into employment, exemplify this new era. Their creation followed the publication of the Bertrand Schwartz paper dedicated to youth and unemployment and commissioned by Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy when he took office in 1981. The government ordered the report due to the ever-increasing youth unemployment observed since 1977. As a consequence, the Bertrand Schwartz paper suggested developing new schemes specifically dedicated to this issue: they were to be implemented in urban areas with funding from the state, the regions, sometimes the *départements* (meso-level territories, today designated as prime providers of social services)

and the town council concerned; they would develop cross-sectorial actions to help young people into work (with special funding for work-related training and education, but also more global perspectives with health and social actions). Along with these schemes came a new range of professionals (project leaders in youth professional education) and a new delivery framework.

Public authorities, including town council and regions found greater legitimacy within this emerging framework. They were no longer simply considered, as implementation areas, but they had now become co-decision makers. Moreover, they were expected to provide new solutions better adapted to the needs of their own populations. And young people were considered more when identifying their needs and building proper, relevant local partnerships.

Here again, from one territory to another, local ambitions were not the same. In this perspective, we compared urban policies implemented in Rennes, Lille, Mantes-la-Jolie, and Metz. Whereas urban policies in Rennes and Metz were quite traditional and reflected the importance of their territorial legacy (social catholicism in Rennes and a fall-back position in terms of public action in Metz), urban policies were much more ambitious in Lille and Mantes-la-Jolie. In these two cases, young people were a high priority for these policies; in Lille there was strong support from the local council and in Mantes-la-Jolie it was due to the influence of the *sous-préfet* and of local NGOs led by young people from migrant backgrounds. In both cases, the challenge was to integrate young people from migrant backgrounds, reduce inequality in education, and improve poor housing. In Rennes, emphasis was placed on access to leisure and culture for deprived populations and in Metz, on health and security.

Nevertheless, implementation did not occur under the Ministry for Youth despite its renewed interest in youth. Instead it came under the auspices of several other ministries and bodies: *Missions locales* came under the Ministry for Employment, urban policies under the new *Direction interministérielle à la ville* (urban cross-sectorial body), fighting inequality in education came under the Ministry for Education, and fighting delinquency came under the Interior Ministry. As a consequence, public policies labelled as “youth policies” seemed to be on the verge of disappearing at the end of this decade and a half.

### **Broadening youth policies: multiple public players at the forefront of the fight against youth unemployment (1995-today)**

Notwithstanding, from the mid-nineties to today, youth policies have not come to an end, quite the opposite. What happened during this period to make youth policies grow in strength and number? In our opinion, at least three parallel phenomena occurred: a new range of public bodies took interest in youth policies; youth policy documents became common; the distribution of power among bodies implementing youth policies varied considerably in favour of certain local authorities that appear more legitimate than in the past.

### **A new range of public players**

From 1995, there was a shift in the agenda setting of local youth policies in France.

In 1995, the late historian Françoise Tétard, who was a great specialist of youth policies, mentioning an article on local youth councils, stated: *“It could well be in the more local arena that intentions could become reality, thus finally delivering a youth policy that would truly reach out to young people, to youth as a whole...”*(1995, p. 55). By this assertion, she underlined that if it had been difficult until 1995 to build ambitious and comprehensive youth policies at national level in our country, the solution could perhaps be found at local level.

The year 1995 is also the year of municipal elections with the arrival of newly elected councillors in big towns and cities, among which many had mandates dedicated to youth affairs. This would allow public initiatives to be developed that were clearly named “youth policies”. This did not necessarily mean such work was new; the term just started to apply to other actions that had previously come under other headings such as urban policies.

How can this new trend be explained? It is difficult to single out one reason for this; there are probably several concomitant reasons to consider: a new rise of youth unemployment that exceeded 20% for the first time in our country; an increase in urban rioting since the beginning of the decade; growing awareness about the impact of the ageing process on the funding of the welfare state; a certain institutionalisation of urban policies and the subsequent fading enthusiasm, which urges us to rethink the terms of sectorial policies.

What can be observed from this turning point is the spread of mandates dedicated to youth at all levels of the decision making process. This trend did begin at municipal level but the *départements* were soon concerned by this evolution, rapidly followed by regions, conurbations and *pays* (another meso level between conurbations and town councils introduced at the beginning of the year 2000 and concerning half of the French landmass).

Today, almost all local territories – even the smallest - include a councillor in charge of youth either specifically or alongside childhood and family. And these councillors are not always the weaker ones (women, young, or the least experienced). In some areas, they may even stand rather high within the council hierarchy. In Brittany, for instance, the councillor in charge of youth is the first vice-president of the regional council. However, this remains an exception: most of the time these councillors are rather weak and have no allocated team, service or budget.

The above reflects an interesting shift; although youth policies may not necessarily be more ambitious or costly, it is clear that youth has turned into a significant policy area and that objectives and resources need therefore to be commensurate.

All this is a sign that local authorities are caring for youth and they look set to continue as local councillors highlight how important young people are for the future.

Nevertheless, no obvious decision or dialogue among local authorities is behind this trend which seems to have seeped into policy-making all by itself. Today there is a nationwide network of councillors responsible for local youth policies (although it doesn't seem very active). The profession is neither clearly regulated nor defined.

Some experiences are however worth mentioning: there is a “youth group” within regional assemblies that convenes on a regular basis in Paris; the “B16” which is an informal network of local authorities gathers all the councillors and the professionals in charge of local policies in Brittany; the cross sectorial youth group of the *Département du Finistère* (at the extreme west of the country) gathers the same profiles as well as the local state bodies, schools and main youth workers organisations. Every two years, the *Département de l'Allier* (in the centre of France) organises a congress on local youth policies which brings together around 400 people. Training sessions are organised by the state and local authorities for councillors and professionals to pass on the main competences in terms of youth policies. Two masters' degrees are even offered to certify the expertise required in this field (in Paris and Rennes).

For all these reasons, we think that even if this sector remains quite weak, this process will gain in importance over the coming year: youth policies undeniably tend to prosper in our country.

### **Increase in youth policy documents**

Another element could confirm our assertion: the last fifteen years have been punctuated by the publication of youth policy projects at all levels of the decision making process. These documents are either quite narrow in scope, focusing on leisure and citizenship, or they develop a very cross-sectorial approach and adopt the European idea of “integrated youth policies” (even if they hardly ever refer to them).

The most famous document is probably the White paper: a new impetus for European youth (2001) that was the first step towards an ambitious youth policy in partnership by the European commission and the Council of Europe. This report was followed by several others, which allowed the process to be consolidated.

Nevertheless, France is also quite committed on a national level: one could underline, among others, the report “Youth, a duty for the future” from the *Commissariat général au plan* (the state’s economic planning commission) (2001) which was followed by the Green Paper “To recognise youth value” from the Youth Ministry (2009) and more recently the “Youth priority” from the *Comité interministériel à la jeunesse* Cross-sectorial Youth Committee.

Each of these reports puts forward a set of position statements on youth living conditions in our country, and then drafts proposals for more accurate public responses to overcome the challenges faced by young people.

In parallel, local authorities have also provided frameworks for their youth policies. These frameworks propose an adaptation to the variety of local situations and to take into account social and territorial inequalities in the support delivered to young people. What is interesting in these cases, is the variety of ideas and discussions generated by local authorities. In the Brittany region, we could mention the regional reports (the first was published in 2011 and the second in 2013) which propose charters in favour of young people; the reports by the *Département d’Ille-et-Vilaine* or by the *Département du Finistère*; the youth policy document elaborated by the *Agglomération de Morlaix* (in 2007 and 2013) (a medium size conurbation, both rural and urban in the north-west of the region); or the youth policy written by Ploemer’s town council in 2010 (a small town in the south of the region). These are just a few examples among many.

These documents vary considerably from one area to another but their common feature is their efforts in organising dialogue between public authorities, youth workers and to a lesser extent with young people. Regarding the latter, the approaches adopted in the towns of

Morlaix and Ploemer have to be highlighted; they attempted to collect young people's views and recommendations.

Another common point is that all these policy documents, at all levels of the decision making process, recommend a cross-sectorial approach. This aspect really comes across as a "new" motto with regard to youth policies. It is not that the idea is new as Maurice Herzog already intended to promote it back in 1958; it is rather the systematic character that is interesting. There is every reason to believe this motto is a new belief concerning all youth policies.

The basis is simple: young people are a very tricky population to describe due to the many situations and social difficulties they have to face.

Even speaking about "youth" may be inaccurate in that it may be more relevant to refer to several "youth" populations. Furthermore, it is impossible for any public sector to meet all the needs of young people and the only real way to deal with this is to promote a cross-sectorial approach.

This is particularly true at local level; apart from the multiple public sectors, there are several levels of public authority, each providing a wide range of public services.

Consequently, all the reports recommend applying this framework to their youth policies. Nevertheless, what is particularly interesting is that the definition of the cross-sectorial approach is not the same from one policy document to another.

At the European level a definition was promoted by Lasse Siurala in 2005: *"To ensure the successful integration of young people into society would require coordination of youth related affairs on key policy domains at national, regional and local levels: education and training ; employment and the labour market; health; housing; leisure. Other domains which are relevant for youth include social protection, welfare and family and criminal justice"* (2005, p. 34).

Nevertheless, an analysis of the various documents shows that several understandings of the idea actually coexist: in some cases, it is about collaborating between the youth sector (leisure, culture, citizenship) and neighbouring sectors such as education and social affairs; in other cases, a broader approach is promoted with town and country planning or housing for instance but this only occurs in certain parts of the decision making process (in assessments or recommendations); in a third perspective, some policy documents promote the involvement of all parties when they develop their own sectorial initiatives under the mainstreaming method

(they are asked to take into account young people's needs whenever they develop a new action and to make sure that the latter is favourable to this population).

Several interesting questions arise in the context of contemporary youth policies beyond the common trends, the more numerous policy documents and the cross-sectorial approach: What are the linkages between the various players? How do they build their partnerships? Which is currently the most legitimate?

### **The parties involved in current youth policies**

As shown in the first part of this article, the question of those involved in youth policies was existent from their inception at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: they all resulted from a collaboration by the state and local authorities and NGOs (that could be referred to as youth work but it is probably a bit inaccurate to confine the NGO sector acting in favour of young people to what is usually considered as youth work abroad). These three ranges of stakeholders have all along been involved in youth policies but their respective influence have changed throughout history: whereas NGOs were the leaders at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, followed first by local authorities and the state; the state had the prominent role from the end of the second world war and the eighties, the NGOs were the second main actors; currently local authorities are the central stakeholders followed by the state and the NGOs.

Before mentioning the relationship between public authorities and NGOs, let us examine that which existed between the state and local authorities. As seen in the first part of the article, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1936, town councils were not, strictly speaking, leaders but nevertheless in some cases they were more influential than the state in supporting NGOs in youth policies. From 1936 and in particular from 1958, this power struggle changed and the state became predominant even if town councils did go on playing a role in their areas. This situation prevailed until 1982 when local authorities gained considerable power through the decentralisation process and the contract-based policies. This is particularly true for town councils and regional councils. Since this period, as shown by Cole (2012), various reforms have led to an increased influence of local authorities. Nevertheless, among them, regions and conurbations are clearly the winners whenever *départements* have lost influence (albeit their crucial importance in social affairs) and town councils have remained relatively stable.

As all levels of decision-making are involved in framing youth policies, it is very important to analyse these relationships if we are to grasp how complex the system is, and to identify potential tensions and levers.

Currently, we face quite a blurred situation: the regional state agency for youth affairs is still quite powerful in terms of human resources (even if the number of state employees is dropping, they remain real field experts) but no longer in terms of financial means (youth policy funding was never very high and is rapidly diminishing); local authorities, in particular regions, are contributing more to funding in youth policies but agencies remain really small which means that few specialists are allocated to youth policy-making.

However, this is not enough to qualify the situation: as youth services among local regional state bodies and among local council services may appear rather powerless, the question of youth is largely dealt with by stronger parts of the administration: the agencies and departments in charge of employment, education or health, remain rather centralised and well-funded. Currently, although the central state keeps speaking up for youth, it is quite clear that any major government spending will go on employment and education before the youth sector.

Another complex situation prevails at the level of local authorities; the regions seemingly continue to gain power (confirmed by the current rescaling planned that is set to double the size of France's regions), whereas most youth issues come within the remit of the *départements* as main providers of social policies.

And yet, nobody really knows what will become of this level of decision in the coming years or where their competences will be transferred to.

To sum up, local authorities, in particular regions and conurbations are currently the most powerful in the field of youth policies, but the local state body in charge of youth along with the *départements* remain strongholds in terms of expertise and funding.

We will now move to the relationship between public bodies and NGOs. In France, many NGOs intervene to support young people in leisure, culture and citizenship (the legacy of youth movements and the heart of what could be called the youth work). However there are also other large organisations such as the *Missions locales* that help young people into employment, and other schemes aimed at supporting excluded youth (usually coming under the responsibility of the *départements* such as low threshold schemes) and even at advising



young people on healthy living (such as *Maisons des ados* which are centres catering for teenagers' psychological needs and problems).

These organisations played a crucial role in that the public initiatives were mainly their own, but how does the situation stand today? We are in fact facing a real paradox: while youth policies have gained in strength, NGOs seem to have become weaker. It is not that the latter are less important than before in delivering services, since public authorities remain highly dependent on them. But they have become less influential in policy-making and agenda-setting. Nevertheless, they have had no choice: their funding (and their human resources) depended on their acceptance of this shift.

They are no longer able to initiate or even participate in the actual policy making process and are relegated to the role of simple underlings.

What factors can explain this reality? At least two parallel phenomena could be mentioned: firstly, state reorganisation has led to greater reliance on public procurement, accountability and (self-) assessment; and secondly, the social crisis has meant cost-cutting which has in turn led to lower funding levels for NGOs from public authorities. Thus, NGOs now have to reduce the scope of their work to match calls for tender and to ensure accountability, and they have limited the ways they intervene. This reality is particularly hard-hitting since NGOs, due to the contract-based principle of youth policies, depend on several funders and therefore have to deal with diverse demands.

To illustrate this assertion, we can refer to the example of the *Missions locales* which were implemented at the beginning of the eighties: their aim was to work on social and professional integration of young people. Doing so, they were supposed to develop a global approach of young people's needs and to focus both on their social problems (such as housing, social rights or health for instance) and on their professional demands (in particular in terms of training delivery). Thus, during the last decade, they have had to focus almost exclusively on professional aspects and to select among young people those who were the closest to the labour market entrance in order to satisfy their accountability requirements.

One can therefore underline the relative importance youth policies have gained during the last decades: they are shared by a growing number of public bodies, and are institutionalised through ambitious policy documents. Nevertheless, this trend goes hand in hand with a deep complexity that does not solve the question of leadership in youth policies.

## **Beyond the discourse: which resources for which ambitions?**

Having made these observations, is it possible to consider that French youth policies henceforth constitute strong and coherent public policies (with large funding, broad legal powers and numerous, well institutionalised professionals) able to take on the large scope of youth issues? Our answer is of course quite mitigated, for at least three reasons.

### **The scarcity of means and the territorial inequalities**

The first reason is the question of means: as seen previously, youth policies are monitored by numerous public bodies which are all asserting their great interest for young people's routes to adulthood. Nevertheless, the means (human and financial) dedicated to youth issues, albeit slightly up, are still quite low, especially when one bears in mind the great consequences of the social crisis (not only in terms of youth unemployment for a quarter of them but also in terms of unstable working conditions, poor housing, consequences on access to health and social services, etc...). There are fewer and fewer youth experts in the local state bodies (a dozen or so in Brittany) and very few in local authorities (for instance, two persons for the Brittany's regional council, one person in the *Département d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, one person for the *Rennes Métropole* (council of the greater Rennes area), three persons for the *Ville de Rennes* (city council). The budgets are just as scarce (even if it is not possible to mention the exact amounts of spending because they are not always labelled "youth" or are associated with other sectors): we know that the state (at both central and local levels) will spend €564 million in 2014 for youth, sport and community life which represents slightly over 1% of the global social expenditure.

This observation is all the more true when one bears in mind the great variety of spending from one territory to another. As shown above, youth policies are currently the result of complex partnerships between various components of the state and all the levels of public authorities. Yet, the interest shown by local authorities varies both according to the political will of councillors and the wealth of each territory.

Not all councillors share the same interest in, or political values for, youth issues. Just to give an example, the former president Nicolas Sarkozy had a special interest in youth: his main objective was to maintain social peace and to contain youth delinquency and youth riots. The current president is more interested in employment, education and social affairs. We find the

same diversity throughout territories with leaders who alternatively pay particular attention to law and order, health, wellbeing, poverty... but, usually, the main issue for local policy makers is youth employment, we will come back to this.

In France, territories' wealth depends both on the credits allocated by the central state and on the resources obtained through local and professional taxes. Of course, it is where tax incomes are the lowest that young people's difficulties are the greatest. Consequently, even if the state marginally compensates for these realities, it is often where public interventions would be the most useful that local authorities have to be more modest.

For instance, the case of the *Département de Seine-Saint-Denis* (a large urban and deprived area close to Paris) is particularly enlightening: among others elements, it has the highest level of youth unemployment in France, the lowest income households, and it is where access to health services is the most acute. This *département* is the least well-off in the country and the local authorities are struggling to fund and invest adequately to secure young people's routes into adulthood (Loncle et al., 2008).

Nevertheless, territorial inequalities do not only result from financial issues, they are also related to the quality of the partnerships (between the state, the local authorities and the NGOs) that are evidently central in such a complex policy area. Yet these partnerships are rather uneven in our country: using various research projects, we have been able to show that in some cases they are integrated, the various protagonist are able to work together, they foster common objectives and agreement on implementation (in Ille-et-Vilaine in our last study), whereas in some other cases they are more fragmented, dependent on external factors and characterised by many antagonisms between the stakeholders (which can even be in concurrence with each others); consequently they do not lead to coherent and ambitious actions (in *Département de l'Hérault* and *Département de Seine-Saint-Denis*, for instance). As a consequence, the influence of local youth policies is not always very important: when partnerships are integrated they permit to a certain extent to overcome the complexity of the system, when it is not the case, their influence stays very limited and they only marginally achieve to solve young people's needs (Loncle, 2011, see also Andreotti and al. 2012).

### **The obsession of employment**

The second reason for weakness in youth policies is how central the work value is. Of course, employment represents an important and unquestionable motive for policy action (Pickard, 2014). It has largely contributed to the shaping of such action since the eighties, in particular

with the creation of *Missions locales* for youth employment. Nevertheless, this concern is so central that it seems likely to overshadow most of the other objectives: young people have above all to find a job. Something also new is that failure in finding employment is often interpreted as a failure of the individual rather than a structural problem. This welfare-to-work concern is of course not only addressed to young people and include poor people as a whole who are suspected to easily depend on the welfare state (Castel and Duvoux, 2013; Barbier, 2013, Wacquant, 2004).

In a recent study (Loncle, to be published), we have shown that this value is currently predominant not only in the employment sector, which is to be expected, but also in other sectors of public intervention. We studied the influence of this value in the fields of youth, education, health and social affairs. In each of these, the work value and the focus on the individual hold increasing sway.

For instance, in the field of youth, this value, although traditionally turned towards community, and leisure and citizenship, is becoming predominant through recent schemes such as the civic service (created in 2010, with 65,000 having participated and developed collective actions in different fields such as involvement in the community, culture, sport, education, leisure, international projects...). Whereas this scheme was created to stimulate young people's engagement and citizenship (and to tackle urban rioting) (Becquet, 2013), in recent years it has increasingly sought to help young people access the job market.

In the introduction to a recently published report, François Chérèque, the director of the Civic Service Agency, underlines: "TNS SOFRES [a research institute] in 2013 showed that young people who finished their civic service develop a more positive attitude towards their environment than other young people of the same age and that they find a more dynamic route into employment" (2013, p. 6). With this citation, the shift from citizenship and engagement to employment becomes rather evident.

In itself, this shift is not necessarily a problem.

Nevertheless, it does raise questions because it tends to overshadow all the other sectorial priorities and values. For instance, young people can no longer get involved "freely" in their community. This is clear in the criteria used to select youth initiatives: they are no longer simply encouraged to develop collective projects, the latter have now to develop their employability and young people have to be responsive in this respect.

In addition, the focus on individual failure is really problematic. As shown by various studies, young people in France do not really believe in their future, but the emphasis on individual difficulties and inadequacies hardly helps them to keep up their self-esteem and self-confidence, and this affects the most vulnerable in particular.

In fact young people who face the most difficult social situations are often ill-prepared to enter the job market; they may first have to restore their health, living conditions, their daily routines... The problem is that public authorities seem to focus more on professional integration and are providing less funding for social integration.

### **The lack of coherence in support for young people**

This leads us to the third element of weakness in youth policies: they are complex, underfunded, and they focus normatively on employment, and lack coherence.

As well shown by the rapport Dulin edited in 2012 (Formal rights, real rights: to improve young people's recourse to social rights), youth policies (in particular social ones) are rather ineffective as far as young people's social protection is concerned: schemes for young people appear to be multi-layered; young people's trajectories may come under several statuses; the consistency between national and local delivery may vary from one territory to another; as the regulation of rights depends on partnerships that are contract-based, the general legibility of processes is weak as well as the understanding of access criteria; field workers hardly know *a priori* which amounts they are going to be able to draw on for each young person. In addition, information available to young people on these various schemes is often quite poor due to its lack of legibility. This is compounded by little funding generally.

As we already pointed out (Loncle and al. 2009), in some areas, field workers will provide support to young people who are really excluded on a social basis whereas in other areas they will carry out a pre-selection among potential beneficiaries and put aside the most excluded young people on the pretext that they will be unable to join the workforce. Consequently, young people do not experience the same support throughout the country and those who are the most in need of public support are *de facto* excluded from an assistance system that is really very narrow.

To add to this long list, entitlement depends largely on individual interpretations of field workers and that the latter may be quite normative in their perceptions of young people's situations: the support given largely appears as discretionary (Lima and Trombert 2013). Moreover, young people often fear being stigmatised when they join social schemes and

sometimes prefer not to be judged as inept rather than to seek public support (Rothé 2013; Muniglia, forthcoming).

To sum up, the actions implemented in the field clearly lack coherence from the point of view of the continuity of young people's trajectories.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, France seems to be at a turning point regarding youth policies:

On the one hand, political agenda setting enjoys a favourable context: the president along with government and most local authorities are convinced that large, cross-sectorial policy action for youth is important. This trend is strengthened by a range of local councillors specifically appointed to deal with youth issues, and by various policy documents that help set out a framework for action: youth policies have never been so strong in our country, as the historical reminder underlines.

On the other hand, the system appears highly complex with reliance on local partnerships, normative interpretations of young people's rights, scarce budgets and narrow scope. The whole range of schemes has an acute lack of coherence. In any case, it does not seem able to cope with the ever-growing needs of young people in France, who in the face of social crisis, have to deal with rising unemployment and also, more broadly, greater poverty and vulnerability.

This paradox brings into question the identity of youth policies: do they have to stay "focused" with autonomy of conception and values or would they benefit from a renewed and global approach with a so-called "integrated" process?

These assertions raise at least three subsequent questions: Are the youth employment-focussed policies and subsequent knowledge about support for youth still relevant when considering multiple forms of social issues? How is it possible to secure young people's routes into adulthood in a positive and coherent way while avoiding random practices? Is it possible to make decision-makers (and the population as a whole) realise that young people not only need help with accessing the job market, but they should also be supported in becoming a useful and integral part of French society in all spheres of social life?

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